

## CHAPTER III.

### COMING INCREASE OF SOCIAL PRESSURE.

**T**HE trees, as I write, have not yet begun to leaf, nor even the blossoms to appear; yet, passing down the lower part of Broadway these early days of spring, one breasts a steady current of uncouthly dressed men and women, carrying bundles and boxes and all manner of baggage. As the season advances, the human current will increase; even in winter it will not wholly cease its flow. It is the great gulf-stream of humanity which sets from Europe upon America—the greatest migration of peoples since the world began. Other minor branches has the stream. Into Boston and Philadelphia, into Portland, Quebec and Montreal, into New Orleans, Galveston, San Francisco and Victoria, come offshoots of the same current; and as it flows it draws increasing volume from wider sources. Emigration to America has, since 1848, reduced the population of Ireland by more than a third; but as Irish ability to feed the stream declines, English emigration increases; the German outpour becomes so vast as to assume the first proportions, and the millions of Italy, pressed by want as severe as that of Ireland, begin to turn to the emigrant ship as did the Irish. In Castle Garden one may see the garb and hear the speech of all European peoples. From the firds of Norway, from the plains of Russia and Hungary, from the mountains of Wallachia, and from Mediterranean shores and islands, once the center

of classic civilization, the great current is fed. Every year increases the facility of its flow. Year by year improvements in steam navigation are practically reducing the distance between the two continents; year by year European railroads are making it easier for interior populations to reach the seaboard, and the telegraph, the newspaper, the schoolmaster and the cheap post are lessening those objections of ignorance and sentiment to removal that are so strong with people long rooted in one place. Yet, in spite of this great exodus, the population of Europe, as a whole, is steadily increasing.

And across the continent, from east to west, from the older to the newer States, an even greater migration is going on. Our people emigrate more readily than those of Europe, and increasing as European immigration is, it is yet becoming a less and less important factor of our growth, as compared with the natural increase of our population. At Chicago and St. Paul, Omaha and Kansas City, the volume of the westward-moving current has increased, not diminished. From what, so short a time ago, was the new West of unbroken prairie and native forest, goes on, as children grow up, a constant migration to a newer West.

(This westward expansion of population has gone on steadily since the first settlement of the Eastern shore. It has been the great distinguishing feature in the conditions of our people.) Without its possibility we would have been in nothing what we are. Our higher standard of wages and of comfort and of average intelligence, our superior self-reliance, energy, inventiveness, adaptability and assimilative power, spring as directly from this possibility of expansion as does our unprecedented growth. All that we are proud of in national life and national character comes primarily from our background of unused land. We are but transplanted Europeans, and, for that matter,

mostly of the "inferior classes." It is not usually those whose position is comfortable and whose prospects are bright who emigrate; it is those who are pinched and dissatisfied, those to whom no prospect seems open. There are heralds' colleges in Europe that drive a good business in providing a certain class of Americans with pedigrees and coats of arms; but it is probably well for this sort of self-esteem that the majority of us cannot truly trace our ancestry very far. We had some Pilgrim Fathers, it is true; likewise some Quaker fathers, and other sorts of fathers; yet the majority even of the early settlers did not come to America for "freedom to worship God," but because they were poor, dissatisfied, unsuccessful, or recklessly adventurous—many because they were evicted, many to escape imprisonment, many because they were kidnapped, many as self-sold bondsmen, as indentured apprentices, or mercenary soldiers. It is the virtue of new soil, the freedom of opportunity given by the possibility of expansion, that has here transmuted into wholesome human growth material that, had it remained in Europe, might have been degraded and dangerous, just as in Australia the same conditions have made respected and self-respecting citizens out of the descendants of convicts, and even out of convicts themselves.

It may be doubted if the relation of the opening of the New World to the development of modern civilization is yet fully recognized. In many respects the discovery of Columbus has proved the most important event in the history of the European world since the birth of Christ. (How important America has been to Europe as furnishing an outlet for the restless, the dissatisfied, the oppressed and the downtrodden;) how influences emanating from the freer opportunities and freer life of America have reacted upon European thought and life—we can begin to realize only when we try to imagine what would have been the

present condition of Europe had Columbus found only a watery waste between Europe and Asia, or even had he found here a continent populated as India, or China, or Mexico, were populated.

And, correlatively, one of the most momentous events that could happen to the modern world would be the ending of this possibility of westward expansion. That it must sometime end is evident when we remember that the earth is round.

Practically, this event is near at hand. Its shadow is even now stealing over us. Not that there is any danger of this continent being really overpopulated. Not that there will not be for a long time to come, even at our present rate of growth, plenty of unused land or of land only partially used. But to feel the results of what is called pressure of population, to realize here pressure of the same kind that forces European emigration upon our shores, we shall not have to wait for that. Europe to-day is not overpopulated. In Ireland, whence we have received such an immense immigration, not one-sixth of the soil is under cultivation, and grass grows and beasts feed where once were populous villages. In Scotland there is the solitude of the deer forest and the grouse moor where a century ago were homes of men. One may ride on the railways through the richest agricultural districts of England and see scarcely as many houses as in the valley of the Platte, where the buffalo herded a few years back.

Twelve months ago, when the hedges were blooming, I passed along a lovely English road near by the cottage of that "Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" of whom I read, when a boy, in a tract which is a good sample of the husks frequently given to children as religious food, and which is still, I presume, distributed by the American, as it is by the English, Tract Society. On one side of the road was a wide expanse of rich land, in which no plowshare had

that season been struck, because its owner demanded a higher rent than the farmers would give. On the other, stretched, for many a broad acre, a lordly park, its velvety verdure untrodden save by a few light-footed deer. And, as we passed along, my companion, a native of those parts, bitterly complained that, since this lord of the manor had inclosed the little village green and set out his fences to take in the grass of the roadside, the cottagers could not keep even a goose, and the children of the village had no place to play! Place there was in plenty, but, so far as the children were concerned, it might as well be in Africa or in the moon. And so in our Far West, I have seen emigrants toiling painfully for long distances through vacant land without finding a spot on which they dared settle. In a country where the springs and streams are all inclosed by walls he cannot scale, the wayfarer, but for charity, might perish of thirst, as in a desert. There is plenty of vacant land on Manhattan Island. But on Manhattan Island human beings are packed closer than anywhere else in the world. There is plenty of fresh air all around—one man owns forty acres of it, a whiff of which he never breathes, since his home is on his yacht in European waters; but, for all that, thousands of children die in New York every summer for want of it, and thousands more would die did not charitable people subscribe to fresh-air funds. The social pressure which forces on our shores this swelling tide of immigration arises not from the fact that the land of Europe is all in use, but that it is all appropriated. That will soon be our case as well. Our land will not all be used; but it will all be "fenced in."

We still talk of our vast public domain, and figures showing millions and millions of acres of unappropriated public land yet swell grandly in the reports of our Land Office. But already it is so difficult to find public land fit

for settlement, that the great majority of those wishing to settle find it cheaper to buy, and rents in California and the New Northwest run from a quarter to even one-half the crop.) It must be remembered that the area which yet figures in the returns of our public domain includes all the great mountain chains, all the vast deserts and dry plains fit only for grazing, or not even for that; it must be remembered that of what is really fertile, millions and millions of acres are covered by railroad grants as yet unpatented, or what amounts to the same thing to the settler, are shadowed by them; that much is held by appropriation of the water, without which it is useless; and that much more is held under claims of various kinds, which, whether legal or illegal, are sufficient to keep the settler off unless he will consent to pay a price, or to mortgage his labor for years.

(Nevertheless, land with us is still comparatively cheap. But this cannot long continue.) The stream of immigration that comes swelling in, added to our steadily augmenting natural increase, will soon now so occupy the available lands as to raise the price of the poorest land worth settling on to a point we have never known. Nearly twenty years ago Mr. Wade, of Ohio, in a speech in the United States Senate, predicted that by the close of the century every acre of good agricultural land in the Union would be worth at least \$50. That his prediction will be even more than verified we may already see. By the close of the century our population, at the normal rate of increase, will be over forty millions more than in 1880. That is to say, within the next seventeen years an additional population greater than that of the whole United States at the close of the civil war will be demanding room. Where will they find cheap land? There is no farther West. Our advance has reached the Pacific, and beyond the Pacific is the East, with its teeming millions. From

San Diego to Puget Sound there is no valley of the coast-line that is not settled or preëmpted. To the very farthest corners of the Republic settlers are already going. The pressure is already so great that speculation and settlement are beginning to cross the northern border into Canada and the southern border into Mexico; so great that land is being settled and is becoming valuable that a few years ago would have been rejected—land where winter lasts for six months and the thermometer goes down into the forties below zero; land where, owing to insufficient rainfall, a crop is always a risk; land that cannot be cultivated at all without irrigation. The vast spaces of the western half of the continent do not contain anything like the proportion of arable land that does the eastern. The "great American desert" yet exists, though not now marked upon our maps. (There is not to-day remaining in the United States any considerable body of good land unsettled and unclaimed, upon which settlers can go with the prospect of finding a homestead on government terms.) Already the tide of settlement presses angrily upon the Indian reservations, and but for the power of the General Government would sweep over them. Already, although her population is as yet but a fraction more than six to the square mile, the last acre of the vast public domain of Texas has passed into private hands, the rush to purchase during the past year having been such that many thousands of acres more than the State had were sold.

We may see what is coming by the avidity with which capitalists, and especially foreign capitalists, who realize what is the value of land where none is left over which population may freely spread, are purchasing land in the United States. This movement has been going on quietly for some years, until now there is scarcely a rich English peer or wealthy English banker who does not, either

individually or as the member of some syndicate, own a great tract of our new land, and the purchase of large bodies for foreign account is going on every day. It is with these absentee landlords that our coming millions must make terms.

(Nor must it be forgotten that, while our population is increasing, and our "wild lands" are being appropriated, the productive capacity of our soil is being steadily reduced, which, practically, amounts to the same thing as reducing its quantity. Speaking generally, the agriculture of the United States is an exhaustive agriculture.) We do not return to the earth what we take from it; each crop that is harvested leaves the soil the poorer. We are cutting down forests which we do not replant; we are shipping abroad, in wheat and cotton and tobacco and meat, or flushing into the sea through the sewers of our great cities, the elements of fertility that have been embedded in the soil by the slow processes of nature, acting for long ages.

(The day is near at hand when it will be no longer possible for our increasing population freely to expand over new land; when we shall need for our own millions the immense surplus of food-stuffs now exported; when we shall not only begin to feel that social pressure which comes when natural resources are all monopolized, but when increasing social pressure here will increase social pressure in Europe. How momentous is this fact we begin to realize when we cast about for such another outlet as the United States has furnished. We look in vain. The British possessions to the north of us embrace comparatively little arable land; the valleys of the Saskatchewan and the Red River are being already taken up, and land speculation is already raging there in fever. Mexico offers opportunities for American enterprise and American capital and American trade, but scarcely for American emigration. There is some room for our settlers in that

northern zone that has been kept desolate by fierce Indians ; but it is very little. The table-land of Mexico and those portions of Central and South America suited to our people are already well filled by a population whom we cannot displace unless, as the Saxons displaced the ancient Britons, by a war of extermination. Anglo-Saxon capital and enterprise and influence will doubtless dominate those regions, and many of our people will go there ; but it will be as Englishmen go to India or British Guiana. Where land is already granted and where peon labor can be had for a song, no such emigration can take place as that which has been pushing its way westward over the United States. So of Africa. Our race has made a permanent lodgment on the southern extremity of that vast continent, but its northern advance is met by tropical heats and the presence of races of strong vitality. On the north, the Latin branches of the European family seem to have again become acclimated, and will probably in time revive the ancient populousness and importance of Mediterranean Africa ; but it will scarcely furnish an outlet for more than them. As for Equatorial Africa, though we may explore and civilize and develop, we cannot colonize it in the face of the climate and of races that increase rather than disappear in presence of the white man. The arable land of Australia would not merely be soon well populated by anything like the emigration that Europe is pouring on America, but there the forestalling of land goes on as rapidly as here. Thus we come again to that greatest of the continents, from which our race once started on its westward way, Asia—mother of peoples and religions— which yet contains the greater part of the human race— millions who live and die in all but utter unconsciousness of our modern world. In the awakening of those peoples by the impact of Western civilization lies one of the greatest problems of the future.

But it is not my purpose to enter into such speculations. What I want to point out is that we are very soon to lose one of the most important conditions under which our civilization has been developing—that possibility of expansion over virgin soil that has given scope and freedom to American life, and relieved social pressure in the most progressive European nations. Tendencies, harmless under this condition, may become most dangerous when it is changed. Gunpowder does not explode until it is confined. You may rest your hand on the slowly ascending jaw of a hydraulic press. It will only gently raise it. But wait a moment till it meets resistance!